

What is claimed:

1. A method of evaluating clearance between a support contour of a seat cushion and an adjacent pelvic and proximal thigh anatomical portion of a person sitting on the cushion, comprising:
  - selecting a clearance measurement device which deforms in response to force applied thereto;
  - locating the clearance measurement device on the support contour at a predetermined location where the clearance is to be evaluated;
  - sitting the person on the cushion with the clearance measurement device located between the anatomical portion and the support contour at the predetermined location where the clearance is to be evaluated; and
  - evaluating the clearance at the predetermined location by determining the extent to which the clearance measurement device was deformed as a result of the person sitting on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent to the support contour at the predetermined location.
2. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:
  - selecting the clearance measurement device to include a piece of impression foam having a crush characteristic which collapses the impression foam upon the application of force to the impression foam; and
  - evaluating the clearance at the predetermined location by determining the extent of collapse of the impression foam.
3. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:
  - using as the clearance measurement device a piece of impression foam having a crush characteristic which collapses the impression foam upon the application of force to the impression foam; and
  - evaluating the clearance that the predetermined location by determining the extent of collapse of the impression foam.
4. A method as defined in claim 3, further comprising:
  - selecting the impression foam to have the crush characteristic which has the capability to collapse to at least 80% of an initial thickness of non-collapsed impression foam.

5. A method as defined in claim 3, further comprising:  
selecting the impression foam to have the crush characteristic which has the capability to collapse to at least 90% of an initial thickness of non-collapsed impression foam.
6. A method as defined in claim 3, further comprising:  
selecting the impression foam to have the crush characteristic which has the capability to collapse to a predetermined fraction of an initial thickness of non-collapsed impression foam, and
5. selecting the impression foam with the predetermined fraction being sufficiently small to avoid creating an unnatural force against the anatomical portion upon the impression foam fully collapsing.
7. A method as defined in claim 3, further comprising:  
selecting the impression foam to have the crush characteristic in which a crushing force is within the range of 1.50 to 1.85 pounds per square inch.
8. A method as defined in claim 3, further comprising:  
selecting the impression foam to have the crush characteristic in which a crushing force is approximately 1.56 pounds per square inch.
9. A method as defined in claim 3, further comprising:  
evaluating the clearance by attempting to collapse the impression foam to a greater extent than the impression foam was collapsed by sitting the person on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent to the support contour.
10. A method as defined in claim 3, further comprising:  
evaluating the clearance by forming a hole through the impression foam at a location where the impression foam was collapsed by sitting the person on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent to the support contour.
11. A method as defined in claim 3, further comprising:  
enclosing the impression foam within a flexible plastic envelope prior to locating the clearance measurement device on the support contour at the predetermined location where the clearance is to be evaluated.
12. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:

selecting the clearance measurement device to include a piece of putty-like substance having a malleable characteristic which indents upon the application of force to the putty; and

- 5       evaluating the clearance at the predetermined location by determining the extent of indentation of the putty.

13. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:

using as the clearance measurement device a piece of putty-like substance having a malleable characteristic which indents upon the application of force to the putty-like substance; and

- 5       evaluating the clearance at the predetermined location by determining the extent of indentation of the putty-like substance.

14. A method as defined in claim 13, further comprising:

establishing a predetermined thickness of the putty-like substance prior to locating the putty-like substance on the support contour at the predetermined location where the clearance is to be evaluated and prior to sitting the person on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent to the support contour.

- 5       15. A method as defined in claim 14, further comprising:

evaluating the clearance by determining whether the putty-like substance has been indented with respect to the predetermined thickness.

16. A method as defined in claim 15, further comprising:

establishing the predetermined thickness uniformly over an entire surface of the putty-like substance.

17. A method as defined in claim 13, further comprising:

determining an initial thickness of the putty-like substance prior to locating the putty-like substance on the support contour at the predetermined location where the clearance is to be evaluated and prior to sitting the person on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent to the support contour; and

- 5       evaluating the clearance by determining whether the initial thickness of the putty-like substance has changed as a result of sitting the person on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent to the support contour.

18. A method as defined in claim 13, further comprising:  
measuring an initial thickness of the putty-like substance prior to  
locating the putty-like substance on the support contour at the predetermined  
location where the clearance is to be evaluated and prior to sitting the person on  
5 the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent to the support contour;  
forming a hole through the putty-like substance at a location  
corresponding to the predetermined location where the clearance is to be  
evaluated after the person sat on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent  
to the support contour;
- 10 measuring the thickness of the putty-like substance at the hole; and  
evaluating the clearance by comparing the measured thickness with  
the initial thickness.
20. A method as defined in claim 13, further comprising:  
enclosing the putty-like substance within a flexible plastic envelope  
prior to locating the clearance measurement device on the support contour at a  
predetermined location where the clearance is to be evaluated;
21. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:  
selecting the clearance measurement device to include a flexible  
envelope containing fluid;  
applying pressure to conduct the fluid from the envelope by sitting the  
5 person on the cushion with the envelope between the anatomical portion and the  
support contour; and  
evaluating the clearance at the predetermined location by  
determining the amount of fluid remaining in the envelope after the person has  
been sitting on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent the support  
10 contour.
22. A method as defined in claim 1, further comprising:  
using as the clearance measurement device a flexible envelope  
containing fluid;

- applying pressure to conduct the fluid from the envelope by sitting the  
5 person on the cushion with the envelope between the anatomical portion and the  
support contour; and
- evaluating the clearance at the predetermined location by  
determining the amount of fluid remaining in the envelope after the person has  
been sitting on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent the support  
10 contour.
23. A method as defined in claim 22, further comprising:  
establishing a predetermined initial amount of fluid in the envelope  
prior to locating the envelope on the support contour at the predetermined location  
where the clearance is to be evaluated and prior to sitting the person on the  
5 cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent to the support contour.
24. A method as defined in claim 23, further comprising:  
conducting the fluid from the envelope through a one-way valve  
which permits fluid flow out of the envelope and prevents fluid flow into the  
envelope.
25. A method as defined in claim 24, further comprising:  
measuring the amount of fluid in the envelope prior to locating the  
envelope on the support contour at the predetermined location where the  
clearance is to be evaluated and prior to sitting the person on the cushion with the  
5 anatomical portion adjacent to the support contour;  
measuring the amount of fluid remaining in the envelope after the  
person has been sitting on the cushion with the anatomical portion adjacent the  
support contour; and  
evaluating the clearance by comparing the measured initial amount  
10 of fluid with the measured remaining amount of fluid.
26. A method as defined in claim 1, used to measure the clearance with  
respect to a wheelchair user and a wheelchair cushion.
27. A method as defined in claim 1, used to determine an appropriate  
one of a plurality of different cushions which each have a different support contour  
for supporting the anatomical portion of the person, comprising:

- performing the aforesaid steps with a first cushion having a first
- 5 support contour to obtain a first clearance from the first support contour;
- performing the aforesaid steps with a second cushion having a
- second support contour to obtain a second clearance from the second support
- contour at substantially the same predetermined location that the first clearance
- was obtained; and
- 10 selecting one of the first or second support contours by evaluating
- the first and second clearances relative to one another.